

Jesus Christ and Traditions of the Elders

Historical Background of Traditions of the Elders

Hebrew Priest Josephus calls Traditions of the Elders as Tradition of our forefathers which was established by the Pharisees. Josephus belonged to the sect of Pharisees (The Life of Flavius Josephus, Paragraph 2).

Maccabean Victory and Feast of rededication in 1 Maccabees 4 came as a result of the strong determination of Mattathias and his five sons in obeying the laws of God and Mattathias told his sons to obey the laws of God before his death (1 Maccabees 2:20-27, 1 Maccabees 2:49-68). After the death of Mattathias and Judas Maccabeus, Jonathan (the brother of Maccabeus) took over the leadership position of Judas Maccabeus which is mentioned in 1 Maccabees 9:31. During the high priesthood of Jonathan, Jonathan failed to keep the words of his father Mattathias on obeying the laws of God and this led to the establishment of the sects like Pharisees, Sadducees, and Essenes.

Josephus mentions that the sect of Pharisees was in existence as early as when Jonathan (the brother of Judas Maccabeus) was in power (160 BC to 143 BC).

"At this time there were three sects among the Judeans, who had different opinions concerning human actions; the one was called the sect of the Pharisees, another the sect of the Sadducees, and the other the sect of the Essens." ^[1].

It must be noted that Judean(s) is often mistranslated as a Jew(s) ^[2].

It was the sect of Pharisees who introduced Traditions of the forefathers.

Josephus - "What I would now explain is this, that the Pharisees have delivered to the people a great many observances by succession from their fathers, **which are not written in the laws of Moses**; and for that reason it is that the Sadducees reject them, and say that we are to esteem those observances to be obligatory which are in the written word, but are not to observe what are derived from the tradition of our forefathers." ^[3].

Josephus mentions that traditions of the forefathers existed as early as when John Hyrcanus (135 BC - 104 BC) ruled. This can be seen in Antiquities of Judeans XIII.XVI.II

Antiquities of Judeans XIII.XVI.II - "So she (Salome who is also known as Alexandra) made Hyrcanus high priest, because he was the elder, but much more because he cared not to meddle with politics, and permitted the Pharisees to do everything; to whom also she ordered the multitude to be obedient. **She also restored again those practices which the Pharisees had introduced, according to the traditions of their forefathers, and which her father-in-law, Hyrcanus, had abrogated.**"

In Aramaic, Traditions of the Elders is called "Mashlmanwatha da Qashishe. ^[4]"

Jesus Christ against Traditions of the Elders

Jesus Christ severely criticized the Pharisees and the scribes for obeying Traditions of the Elders which nullified the word of God ^[5]. That's why Jesus Christ's biggest opponents were the scribes and the pharisees ^[6].

Traditions of the Elders later evolved and later came to be known as Talmud.

This is also agreed by Jewish society.

Rabbi Michael Rodkinson - "The Talmud, then, is the written form of that which, in the time of Jesus, was called the Traditions of the Elders, and to which he makes frequent allusions"^[7].

When Jesus Christ opposes the Pharisees and the scribes, he implies his strong opposition against Traditions of the elders on several occasions.

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Mark 7:2-5 (Paul Younan Interlinear Translation of Aramaic NT) - "And they saw some of his disciples who were eating bread, while their hands were not washed; and they complained. For all the Jews and the Pharisees, if they carefully not wash their hands, they do not eat, because they hold onto the traditions of the elders. And [goods] from the marketplace, unless they are washed, they would not eat. And there are many other [traditions] that they have received to keep, washings of cups, and of pots, and of brass vessels, and of beds. And the scribes and the Pharisees asked him, Why do not your disciples walk according to the tradition of the elders; but, while their hands are not washed, they eat bread? ^[8]"

The scribes and the Pharisees tried to make them **clean outwardly** through careful washing of their hands, washing of goods from marketplace and traditions like these such as washings of hands, cups, pots, brass vessels, and of beds. But at the same time, traditions of the elders nullified the word of God ^[9]. By nullifying the word of God through their traditions, they defiled

themselves through evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, coveting, wickedness, deceit, sensuality, envy, slander, pride, foolishness and these evil things which come from **within** a person ^[10].

Jesus Christ on several occasions opposes the Pharisees and the scribes by strongly opposing Traditions of the Elders. Here are some examples.

Luke 11:37-41(NIV) - "When Jesus had finished speaking, a Pharisee invited him to eat with him; so he went in and reclined at the table. **But the Pharisee was surprised when he noticed that Jesus did not first wash before the meal.** Then the Lord said to him, "**Now then, you Pharisees clean the outside of the cup and dish, but inside you are full of greed and wickedness. You foolish people! Did not the one who made the outside make the inside also? But now as for what is inside you—be generous to the poor, and everything will be clean for you.**"

Matthew 23:25-26 (NIV) - "Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! **You clean the outside of the cup and dish, but inside they are full of greed and self-indulgence. Blind Pharisee! First clean the inside of the cup and dish, and then the outside also will be clean.**"

Matthew 23:27-28 (NIV) - "Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! **You are like whitewashed tombs, which look beautiful on the outside but on the inside are full of the bones of the dead and everything unclean.** In the same way, on the outside you appear to people as righteous but on the inside you are full of hypocrisy and wickedness."

Luke 12:1 (NIV) - "Meanwhile, when a crowd of many thousands had gathered, so that they were trampling on one another, Jesus began to speak first to his disciples, saying: "**Be on your guard against the yeast of the Pharisees, which is hypocrisy.**"

Matthew 16:11-12 (NIV) - "But be on your guard against the yeast of the Pharisees and Sadducees." Then they understood that he was not telling them to guard against the yeast used in bread, **but against the teaching of the Pharisees and Sadducees.**"

Josephus mentions about the doctrine of Sadducees which can be read here ^[11].

A great example of nullifying the word of God can be read below.

Matthew 5:43-45 (NIV) - "You have heard that it was said, "Love your neighbor and **hate your enemy**.' But I tell you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, that you may be children of your Father in heaven."

Love thy neighbor is from Leviticus 19:18.

Nowhere in the Old Testament teaches to hate your enemy. Old Testament teaches to love your enemy through your actions (Proverbs 25:21, Exodus 23:4-5, etc.). "Hate your enemy" violates Exodus 23:4-5 and Proverbs 25:21 while Jesus Christ's teaching "Love your enemies" supports Exodus 23:4-5 and Proverbs 25:21. When you hate your enemy, it is also an act of revenge which violates Leviticus 19:18 where it teaches to not revenge. It must be noted that Jesus Christ taught to love your enemy. Not God's enemy. There was strong opposition between Jesus Christ and the Pharisees, because the Pharisees were "God's enemies."

While mentioning about Traditions of the Elders, Jesus Christ tells this - "**You have let go of the commands of God** and are holding on to human traditions." And he continued, "**You have a fine way of setting aside the commands of God** in order to observe your own traditions! ^[12]."

Jesus Christ points out how Judeans didn't believe in him, because they never believed the laws of Moses and they also didn't keep the law of Moses. In Acts 7, Stephen also points out that Judeans didn't obey the law and they also persecuted and killed the prophets of God and also betrayed and murdered Jesus Christ.

John 5:46-47 (NIV) - "If you believed Moses, you would believe me, for he wrote about me. But since you do not believe what he wrote, how are you going to believe what I say?"

John 7:19 (NIV) - "Has not Moses given you the law? Yet not one of you keeps the law. Why are you trying to kill me?"

Acts 7:52-53 (NIV) - "Was there ever a prophet your ancestors did not persecute? They even killed those who predicted the coming of the Righteous One. **And now you have betrayed and murdered him— you who have received the law that was given through angels but have not obeyed it.**

It must be noted that Jesus Christ calls his generation "**A wicked/evil and adulterous generation**"^[13].

The deception of Traditions of the Elders (later called Talmud) being called Oral Torah

Jewish rabbis claim that Talmud in the beginning was called "Oral Torah" (aka Oral Law). Rabbi Travers Herford claims Oral Law became Traditions of the Elders and finally to Talmud^[14].

But this completely contradicts with what Josephus wrote. Josephus mentions that it was called "Traditions of our forefathers." Josephus never mentions anything about Traditions of the forefathers being called Oral Law.

Josephus calls "Traditions of the Elders" (in Matthew 15, Mark 7) as "Traditions of our forefathers", because Josephus belonged to the sect of Pharisees ^[15].

Josephus (above) mentions that it was Pharisees who **introduced** Traditions of the forefathers which was rejected by the sect of Sadducees and the sect of Pharisees was only established when Jonathan (brother of Judas Maccabeus) was in power (160 BC to 143 BC). Josephus also mentions (above) that Traditions of our forefathers are nothing but "many observances" introduced by the sect of Pharisees.

This is also in agreement with New Testament where Jesus Christ calls Traditions of the Elders as "human traditions." ^[16].

References

1. ↑ Antiquities of Judeans XIII.V.IX
2. ↑ ^{2.0 2.1} <https://archive.org/details/ProblemsWithDeadSeaScrolls>
3. ↑ Antiquities of Judeans Book XIII.X.VI
4. ↑ <http://www.peshitta.org/pdf/Marqsch7.pdf>

5. ↑ Matthew 15, Mark 7
6. ↑ Matthew 23, Luke 11
7. ↑ The History of the Talmud, Vol. II, page 70, Chapter I
8. ↑ <https://archive.org/details/PaulYounanInterlinearTranslation>
9. ↑ Matthew 15:3-5, Mark 7:13-18
10. ↑ Mark 7:14-23
11. ↑ <http://en.metapedia.org/wiki/Sadducees>
12. ↑ Mark 7:8-9
13. ↑ Matthew 12:39, Matthew 16:4, Mark 8:38
14. ↑ http://www.adath-shalom.ca/doc_god.htm
15. ↑ <http://penelope.uchicago.edu/josephus/autobiog.html>
16. ↑ Mark 7:8